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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: GVN APPRECIATES RECENT POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS BUT STILL TROUBLED BY FLAG ISSUE

1. (U) SUMMARY. On April 29, Nguyen Ba Hung, Deputy Director of the Americas Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, met with DCM to convey messages on six issues relating to the bilateral relationship. These issues included the political dialogue in May, the extradition of suspected terrorist Vo Van Duc, USDA funding of American Red Cross nutrition education program, the possible early release of Nguyen Thi Ngoc Hanh, the "involvement" of a high-level U.S. diplomat in demonstrations at the SRV Embassy in Geneva, and the Commonwealth of Virginia's recently signed law on the flag of the former Republic of South Vietnam. Econoff attended as notetaker. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) POL dialogue: Hung provided DCM with a tentative program for the upcoming political consultation in Hanoi (septel). May 14 is an acceptable date to the GVN. He noted that the GVN had incorporated many of Embassy's recommendations, and informed DCM that the GVN is also willing to discuss any new ideas or questions.

3. (U) Hung conveyed the GVN appreciation of the recent ruling to extradite suspected terrorist Vo Van Duc, who is accused of placing a bomb outside the Vietnamese Embassy in Bangkok. Hung noted that the appeals process may potentially delay the extradition. The GVN considers this "a very meaningful gesture," which will promote good anti-terror cooperation, Hung promised.

4. (U) Hung expressed the GVN's pleasure with the USDA approval of the American Red Cross' Child Nutrition Education project in four provinces "that were heavily affected during the war." Hung informed DCM that this project will provide food to approximately 15,000 pupils and nutrition education to the students and their families. The project budget is approximately 2 million USD.

5. (U) On the negative side, Hung conveyed the GVN's disappointment to learn of the possible early release of Nguyen Thi Ngoc Hanh, who was sentenced to a term of five years in prison for involvement in an incident in San Francisco with Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in 2001. According to Hung, a court of appeals in San Francisco is now considering the possibility of shortening the remaining three years of her term.

6. (SBU) Hung claimed that the Vietnamese Mission in Geneva recently reported that the head of the U.S. Delegation to the UNCHR, Ambassador Richard Williamson, "participated in a demonstration" in front of the SRV mission in Geneva following the recent disturbance in the Central Highlands and "delivered remarks to the demonstrators that were highly critical of the GVN." Following the demonstration, according to Hung, Ambassador Williamson invited members of a group called "The Foundation of the Vietnamese Republic" to his residence. Hung noted that the GVN is "very disturbed" by this behavior and takes the matter "very seriously." Hung wondered aloud whether this was an act of personal initiative or whether Ambassador Williamson was acting on official instructions.

7. (U) Hung emphasized the GVN's displeasure with the fact that Governor of the State of Virginia had recently "approved legislation recognizing the use of the flag of the former Republic of South Vietnam as a cultural symbol." Hung said that he understood that Vietnamese Americans have a right to express themselves in this regard, but that this issue could damage the bilateral relationship if more states should follow the examples set by Virginia and Louisiana. He emphasized that the GVN does not understand why the Department cannot do more to "influence" such decisions. Hung noted that the GVN has tried to engage with the overseas Vietnamese community in the U.S. in a positive manner so that many of the divisive issues between Vietnamese Americans and the GVN do not damage the improving relationship between the two countries. BURGHARDT